

Remarks at a Memorial Service for Diane Blair in Fayetteville, Arkansas July 25, 2000

I think my friend would get a big kick out of knowing today that I am virtually at a loss for words. [Laughter] Every friendship has a chronology. Ours started in 1972 when I came up here to Fayetteville to see Diane because she was a delegate to the Democratic National Convention. And we two comprised, along with Jim, some 50 percent of the white Arkansans who wanted to vote for George McGovern. [Laughter]

So we're drinking a cup of coffee or drinking a Coke or something at the union, and I'd met this woman like 10 minutes ago, and I was supposed to be talking politics with her, and all of a sudden, I started talking about Hillary, and I was talking about how much she had reminded me of Hillary. And all of a sudden, I felt that, somehow, she had totally captured me, and in some fundamental way, I would somehow belong to her for the rest of my life. [Laughter] And that's exactly what happened.

And in 1973 when I came home to Arkansas, and then Hillary came here, and I made sure they got together, and Diane and Jim and I—we'd meet her, one of us—we weren't married then, and it's been kind of the most interesting thing in my friendship life that Hillary and I always considered Diane and Jim our best "couple friend." But we were both privileged to have individual friendships with both of them, and it has been a true blessing.

It does tickle me that she worked in all my campaigns, and after Jim made her a rich lady, she still lived in that lousy apartment in Little Rock in '92—[laughter]—still working the campaign. [Laughter] It tickles me that when I married them in 1979—that's one way a Governor has more power than a President; I can't do that anymore—[laughter]—they wanted me to wear a top hat, tails. I even had a cane. And I never get tired of looking at that wedding picture. It's in the program.

Then, this was not a woman to let you wallow in self-pity. In 1980 I became the youngest former Governor in the history of America. [Laughter] So after giving me a couple of months to lick my wounds and feel sorry for myself, she made me show up at her political

science class to explain how I got my brains beat out. [Laughter]

So many times over the last several years, she gave me a home away from home, and then since we've been in the White House, as you heard Hillary say, even in the Governor's mansion, we tried to give them the same.

It was just a little over 5 months ago, and probably 2 or 3 days before we learned that Diane was ill, that Jim came up and spent 3 nights—3 days and 3 nights—in Washington, and we were thinking about all the trips that we would take together when, finally, Hillary and I were liberated from our present responsibilities.

It doesn't take long to live a life. And I guess what I would like to say today is that somehow, I felt about her as I have rarely felt about any human being, that she had this peculiar blend. She was beautiful and good. She was serious and funny. She was completely ambitious to do good and be good but fundamentally selfless.

Sometime in our mid-thirties when Hillary and I were living in the Governor's mansion, we woke up one day and realized we might not live forever and that something could happen to us, and we actually made out a will. And I called Diane and Jim and said, "You know, we're making out this will. Would you raise Chelsea if anything happens to us?"

Thankfully, we were able to watch our children grow up together. Diane had great kids and great stepchildren. Bill and Missy both work for Hillary and me now, and we're very grateful for that.

There are just three other points I would like to make. Diane had an interesting life—came to Arkansas because she married Hugh Kincaid, and she stayed. Jim Blair would be the first person to tell you she made a lot better man out of him than he was before he married her. [Laughter] And most of us would tell you that she somehow made better people of us as well.

But I want to say this, because somebody needs to. I've never seen a more beautiful, complete expression of love in my life than you, Jim, when you fought to save her, and you took care of her when you realized you couldn't.

The second thing I want to tell you is Diane Blair lived to the very end. I mean, really lived. She and I were still doing the New York Times Sunday crossword puzzle together. All these times, you know, we got all these—Hillary and I would get good publicity for flying down here to see Diane, and people wanted to know what we did. We sat on a couch, and we worked the crossword puzzle. And she was exceedingly jealous of me because I would get the copy 3 or 4 days before Sunday, and she got it a couple days later. [Laughter]

So I used to taunt her. I would do it—I would do the crossword puzzle, and I was faithful in doing it. Once she got sick, I did it the first day I got it. I would send it to her, and I would taunt her, because she prided herself so much in being too noble to sneak and see whether I had gotten the answer right if she was having trouble. [Laughter]

The second thing I want you to know is, she was still writing me letters to the end. “Dear President Bill: You should give a farewell address. Only a few Presidents have. You should do it. And here is exactly what you should say.” [Laughter]

I was looking at all of these pictures up here. And I thought about how many times over the years I would just—we’d be up at the lake doing something, just grungy as we could be, all four of us, and Diane would turn a certain way, and I would think: My God, she’s beautiful—

in a totally unique way. And I was seeing all these pictures, thinking about that again.

The last time Hillary and I saw her, I think it was the day before she essentially lost consciousness. And she was there with her little grandchildren on the bed, and she had lost all her hair, and she wasn’t going to the trouble to wear a wig anymore. But her eyes were still burning, and she was so beautiful.

And the last thing she ever said was the thing I’d like to say to you. Hillary and Chelsea and I were standing there, and Hillary and I were holding her hands, and she said, “Before I go”—because we were leaving; we had to leave—she didn’t say before you go, she said, “Before I go, I want to tell you: Remember.” And Hillary said, “Remember what, Diane?” And she smiled and said, “Just remember.” So that’s what I say to you. And every dark and difficult moment of your life, whenever you need to remember something profoundly good, get a little more energy to redouble your efforts, feel less sorry for yourself, be more grateful, just remember.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7 p.m. in the Baum/Walker Hall at the Walton Arts Center. In his remarks, he referred to Ms. Blair’s son, William Reid Kincaid, and daughter, Katherine (Missy) Kincaid.

Letter to Congressional Leaders Transmitting the Report on Burdensharing in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization

July 25, 2000

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Pursuant to section 3(2)(B) of the Senate’s resolution of April 30, 1998, providing its advice and consent to ratification of the Protocols on the Accession of Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic to the North Atlantic Treaty of 1949, I hereby transmit to you the report concerning burdensharing in the Alliance and other matters.

The report contains two sections: (1) an unclassified section on allies’ contributions to common NATO budgets, allies’ national defense budgets and their adequacy, costs incurred to

date in connection with the membership of Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic, and the status of discussions concerning NATO membership for Partnership for Peace countries; and (2) a separate, classified section on steps taken by allies to meet NATO force goals.

Sincerely,

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to Jesse Helms, chairman, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations; John W. Warner, chairman, Senate Committee on Armed Services; Ted Stevens, chairman,